

# Tips for Careworkers: People with Disability – Communication



**What it is:** Here, we mean talking with people with an intellectual or developmental disability or limited communication.

**Why it matters:** Many older people with an intellectual disability have more than one medical condition or advanced illness requiring palliative care.

Many people with intellectual disability are cared for by family carers and as they age, may need more support. In some cases, people with intellectual disability may be admitted to aged care because of:

- increasing care needs
- ageing carers or death of a family carer
- previous arrangements no longer providing enough support
- a lack of appropriate local services or accommodation.

**What I need to know:** Older people with intellectual disability:

- often have poorer health due to other illnesses like epilepsy and diabetes
- may show signs of early ageing
- often have depression and dementia
- may have difficulties with hearing, eyesight and mobility
- may find it difficult to join in a usual activity program
- may have limited access to disability services once in residential aged care
- may have difficulty with communication, speaking, and understanding what is said.

**Do**

Always give the person your full and complete attention and make sure that you have their attention before speaking.

**Do**

Do not talk over the person as though they are not there.

**Do**

Give clear and simple information.  
Use language that fits with the person's communication level.  
Look at the person not the disability.

**Do**

Use pictures and diagrams to clarify explanations if this is an appropriate way to communicate with the person.

**Name:**

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## My reflections:

Do I speak to people with disability in an age-appropriate way?

What can I do when speaking with a person with disability to help them understand what I am saying?

## My notes:

See related palliAGED Practice Tip Sheets:  
People with Specific Needs  
Person-Centred Care  
Talking about Dying

For references and the latest version of all Tip Sheets visit  
[www.palliaged.com.au/PracticeTipSheets](http://www.palliaged.com.au/PracticeTipSheets)

CareSearch is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health. Printed April 2022